

Places that are beautifully detailed to stimulate and delight have one thing in common: buildings and open spaces go hand in glove. There are many exemplary places that demonstrate the ingredients to success. Yet debates about the detail of places, particularly building architecture, are often preoccupied by 'style'. We live in an age of both rapid technological change and amazing eclecticism over design theory and style issues; Neo Classical, Vernacular, Modernism, Postmodernism, Deconstructivism and so on. And whatever the 'ism', the product varies from the excellent to the awful. Our interest is in 'urban architecture' - that is, buildings and open space considered as a totality. Viewed from this perspective, the success of a building is determined by its ability to make a positive contribution to the public realm - to face the street, animate it and make sure that all adjacent open space is positively used. It is this interaction between buildings and the public domain - this edge - that determines the relationship between inside and outside, built and open, public and private, individual and community.

5.2.1 ACTIVE FRONTAGE

Get the rhythm right

Making frontages 'active' adds interest, life and vitality to the public realm. This means:

- frequent doors and windows, with few blank walls;
- narrow frontage buildings, giving vertical rhythm to the street scene;
- articulation of facades, with projections such as bays and porches incorporated, providing a welcoming feeling; and, on occasion,
- lively internal uses visible from the outside, or spilling onto the street.

Table 5.3 provides a scale to judge the performance of designs according to the amount of active frontage. The challenge is to attain 'Grade A frontage' wherever possible. These are most likely to be in core retail areas, though even housing frontages can be enlivened with attention to detail.




A	
B	Quincy Market, Boston, USA: A 100% active location
C	
D	Poundbury, Dorset: Frequent doors and windows onto the street
E	
E	Exposing blank walls to the public realm should be avoided

Table 5.3 Active frontage guidelines	
Grade A frontage	
• More than 15 premises every 100m	• No blind facades and few passive ones
• More than 25 doors and windows every 100m	• Much depth and relief in the building surface
• A large range of functions	• High quality materials and refined details
Grade B frontage	
• 10 to 15 premises every 100m	• A few blind or passive facades
• More than 15 doors and windows every 100m	• Some depth and modelling in the building surface
• A moderate range of functions	• Good quality materials and refined details
Grade C frontage	
• 6 to 10 premises every 100m	• Very little depth and modelling in the building surface
• Some range of functions	• Standard materials and few details
• Less than half blind or passive facades	
Grade D frontage	
• 3 to 5 premises every 100m	• Flat building surfaces
• Little or no range of functions	• Few or no details
• Predominantly blind or passive facades	
Grade E frontage	
• 1 or 2 premises every 100m	• Flat building surfaces
• No range of functions	• No details and nothing to look at
• Predominantly blind or passive facades	

Adapted from Gehl, 1994